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World Chronicle

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JOURNALISTS: Bhaskar Menon, *International Documents Review*
Lucia Mouat, *The Christian Science Monitor*

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UNICEF

Carol BELLAMY, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), discusses issues related to the well-being of children all over the world. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has been ratified by 166 countries, provides the legal and moral basis for the expectation that the needs of children should be met. UNICEF's role has grown from providing emergency relief and assistance to children in need to promoting the development of children through a variety of programmes, such as education, nutrition and immunization. It works in close cooperation with national Governments, as well as NGOs and other United Nations agencies, to identify the needs of children and to assist countries to address those needs.

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ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues. Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**.

As we stand on the threshold of the twenty-first century, we still live in a world that leaves millions of children unprotected against deadly childhood diseases; a world in which nations find resources to support armies, but not to educate the young. And while much of the world enjoys great wealth and commands powerful technologies, millions of children around the world still struggle for the very basics of life, deprived of the right to develop normally in mind and body.

Our guest today is Carol Bellamy, Executive Director of UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund. Joining me to talk with Ms. Bellamy are Bhaskar Menon, of the *International Documents Review*, and Lucia Mouat, of *The Christian Science Monitor*.

Ms. Bellamy, welcome to World Chronicle.

BELLAMY: Thank you.

LITTLEJOHNS: Madame Executive Director, in one of your recent reports you referred to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and you said it was on its way to becoming the first truly universal law of humankind, which is quite a claim. I wonder if you could tell us a bit about the Convention, in which UNICEF was instrumental.

BELLAMY: Well, indeed, I think one can, although that's a bit glorifying in its language, say that, given the fact that this Convention has probably been ratified to date by more countries than any other international treaty or law, or certainly almost as many. I believe as we sit here it's about 181 of the countries that belong to the United Nations, for example—

LITTLEJOHNS: Including fairly recently by the United States. On the intervention of Mrs. Clinton, I think.

BELLAMY: Well, actually, the United States is one of the few countries that hasn't ratified it yet. It has indicated that it would like to by virtue of the Clinton administration indicating it, but ratification would require congressional ratification, US Congressional ratification.

LITTLEJOHNS: But it was signed for the first time by the United States, is that right?

BELLAMY: It was. When Mrs. Clinton attended the service for Jim Grant, [she] announced the—

LITTLEJOHNS: Your predecessor.

BELLAMY: That's right, Jim Grant, my predecessor – a wonderful, wonderful, extraordinary man – she announced the intention of the administration to take it to Congress and seek its ratification. But virtually by almost every other country. What now is important, however, I might point out, is not just ratification world-wide, but beginning implementation. And this is a treaty that basically speaks to acknowledging that the issues involving children are not just survival issues, issues we've been very involved in and still take very seriously, but also a variety of rights and protection-related issues, ranging from those that shock people perhaps the most, such as sexual exploitation or child labour, to just basic protections – protections against violence, protections against actions that would otherwise challenge children and not give them at least the opportunity to experience their full potential. So that now countries are actively at work presenting reports to the committee that was established under this treaty about what they are doing in their countries to respond to the issue of protection. I might point out this also takes into account the responsibilities of children, and it contains throughout the treaty a recognition of the role of parents, but it is a document that says that children are human beings, full human beings, and they have rights and deserve protection.

LITTLEJOHNS: Is there any provision for enforcement of the treaty?

BELLAMY: Well, the provisions of enforcement are basically through the committee that has been established, called the Committee of ten [The Committee on the Rights of the Child]. I think they are highly respected individuals who review the various reports; each country is supposed to report within two years of the time in which the country itself has ratified. But, as well as with so many international documents, it's a matter of public review and public comment, and so part of the enforcement is a self-enforcement in this case. There is not a police that is – "police" I might put in quotes – that is in fact –

MENON: Could I ask you, on those lines it's been said – and I think quite rightly – that law becomes important when morality fails, but if everyone were moral it would not require law. And in this movement towards international law, and of trying to protect children, is there a failure of morality? Are we, in fact, seeing children more and more victims of their adult civilizations?

BELLAMY: Well, I'm not sure I can sit in judgement to determine whether there is a world-wide failure of morality. Certainly we live in a time of extraordinary political and economic turmoil, the so-called "safety net" being lost in many instances – a world in transition. And in some instances, where economically there are extraordinary economic advances or a fast-growing economy, it is important to remember that the human side of the agenda has to be taken into account as well as the economic side of the agenda. That is not

to attempt to reduce the economic activity, but to understand that investing in human beings, and certainly investing in children, constitutes economic development as well.

MENON: But would it be accurate to say that children now are more victimized than they were, say, a hundred years ago?

BELLAMY: I don't know whether one can say that. It may be more public today. I think of the fact that UNICEF, just UNICEF has been around—we're but a young 49, I say, given the fact that the UN is celebrating its fiftieth. We were born out of war, for example, World War II, as were many of the UN organizations, and certainly at that point there were extraordinary challenges to children, if I might say, and that was only 50 years ago. Many of these were basic survival challenges, infant mortality. Well, I think many countries — UNICEF playing just a small part, but a part, nevertheless—many countries can take enormous credit for the advances in their countries in dealing with the issue of infant mortality. But as we say, after survival, what? And there are challenges that exist out there now, the challenges of the exploitation of children in the labour force; the lack of availability of education for all children, and in some instances, certainly, the lack of availability of education for girl children; the kind of violence that exists in the world today, not solely focused on children—and that violence may be violence in the home, it may be violence in the street and, I might point out again, is also violence of war. Today, 50 years after our birth, there may be more children caught in armed conflict, not always State versus State, it may be internally in the State, but there are probably more children caught in armed conflict today than in the last 50 years. So I'm sure you could go a hundred years, two hundred years ago, and point to the challenges for children. I think what one can accurately say is certainly the challenges today are no less great, they may be different, but no less great than they have been in the past.

MOUAT: What is UNICEF able to do about children that are caught in civil wars? We read that 2 million have been killed in the last 10 years. Are you really able to do anything to lessen that, or...?

BELLAMY: Well, we can try to do things to lessen it. I can't tell you—we're back to a failure of morality; perhaps again here is an example of a failure of morality. There is just so much conflict and violence in the world today and, as I said, it's not limited, it is also violence in the family. But with respect specifically to a role that UNICEF might play in armed conflict, we are involved in many parts of the world trying, as I say, to bring some normality into the life of children in what is an otherwise abnormal circumstance. And that may be basic health-care services. So it is still basic immunization; availability of drinking water—not limited to children, but certainly our focus is children; basic disease prevention; trying to assist in the provision of some basic education, even in instances where children

have been ripped out of their own homes – and by that they are displaced even in their own country. But, as well, we have a number of programmes involved in psychosocial counselling of children, dealing with the violence –

MOUAT: Are you getting into that much more? The counselling –

BELLAMY: We are getting into more of that kind of counselling. We're getting into more work with children who have been taken into the armies and become child soldiers. So that is some of the work of UNICEF at this point, and done, I might point out, very often in partnership with many UN organizations and non-governmental organizations. There's more than enough work to go around, and this is generally done in partnership wherever we're working.

MENON: You know, you said that UNICEF came out of war; it started as a sort of emergency relief, you know, to save the children, to feed them, to house them, to get them away from conflict. But from the issues you've just mentioned it's quite clear that UNICEF has evolved. And could you look back over your well-preserved 49 years and look at how that evolution has changed UNICEF? Where has it brought you?

BELLAMY: Well, I'd be glad to. I'm a relatively new Executive Director, only being here seven months or so, and still within my first year, but I'll try and offer my sense of the evolution. UNICEF was born virtually as a fund. It was a transmitter of cash resources, financial resources and food, in some instances, and largely a humanitarian agency really dealing with relief. It evolved, even though it keeps the "E" from emergency in its name, into basically a development organization, and a development organization largely focused on primary health and primary education services for children, and largely, over a number of years, very young children, zero to five. And coming out, for example, into the 80s and the child survival revolution into the early 90s, the World Summit for Children, in which leaders from all over the world gathered in New York, a series of goals primarily focused on child survival issued at that point, and to try and achieve those goals by the year 2000 – universal immunization against childhood diseases that are killers, like polio and measles, and other similar diseases; an attempt to improve the nutrition, reduce malnutrition; the use of low-cost, low-tech interventions, again, dealing with various children's illnesses, or killer illnesses; the use of vitamin A to reduce blindness and death; the use of iodized salt to reduce goiters and mental retardation. So it has evolved from emergency into long-term development, and yet now it finds itself, in the mid-90s, both celebrating some successes in terms of child survival, but a portion of it back in emergencies again, because as a development organization it found itself in a country that then had some kind of conflict break out. And so it is still largely a development organization, but a development organization that has an arm of it or a piece of it that's back involved in humanitarian issues.

What we try and do, as I just mentioned, with the humanitarian side is to still keep that development focus, which is that we are not a refugee organization, a direct relief organization; we're trying to provide some consistent normality for children so that development can continue even after the conflict goes away. And that I think is where we're heading. Back to that first question, and I'll end this here: If I can talk about the evolution, particularly as countries improve economically, what we see is that some countries have made significant gains in reducing child mortality, but the issues now are adolescent health-related issues, they are youth-related issues, and they are protection-related issues. So that's the evolution I see.

MOUAT: Can you give us some sense, in looking back at these goals that were set in 1990 at the World Summit for Children, there are some that are easier to reach than others, right? Can you give us some sense of how we're doing in reaching these? I mean, are most nations going to hit it by 2000, these goals of, you know, such and such a reduction? And where are the most difficult areas to hit?

BELLAMY: I think there's good news, there are some troubling statistics, and then the jury's out on some. So, if I can offer that as a comment. And I might point out that this was one of those UN summits, I know people talk about them all the time, "Oh, they meet and they talk a lot and they write a lot, and does anything ever happen?" Well, we really do try and monitor the results of what came out of that Summit. I recently attended a conference in which 18 countries came together to discuss the status of the mid-decade, you know, midway to the year 2000, where they were and where they were heading. So we really do review and monitor and see where we are. The good news, I would say, is on some of the items I just mentioned—basic child survival in the area of immunization. Our sense is, and we monitor this, that close to 80 per cent of all children now are immunized against this series of crippling or death-producing diseases. I will tell you, though, that that last 20 per cent is probably going to be as hard as reaching the full 80 per cent in the first place. But there are parts of the world totally clean of issues like polio—certainly the United States and Western Europe. We've also done well in reducing other zero-to-five killer diseases. Where we're not doing as well is in reducing maternal mortality and some of the improvements we'd hoped to make in the area of nutrition, improving nutrition. And where I'd say the jury is still out—again I come back to the first—are some of the protection issues.

MOUAT: Clean water?

LITTLEJOHNS: This is **World Chronicle**. Our guest is Carol Bellamy, Executive Director of UNICEF. Lucia, you had a—

MOUAT: I just was asking a follow-up on the—

BELLAMY: Clean water.

MOUAT: Clean water. Isn't that the toughest? I know you're cooperating with a lot of other organizations to get that one tackled, or what?

BELLAMY: I'm not sure I'm prepared to say it's the toughest, but it certainly is a difficult one, because it requires a continued effort. Yes, we're working with others in many instances, in most of these now – this is not just UNICEF. And in fact this is one of the challenges. I say, all the time, we at UNICEF have to get up each morning and say to ourselves, "How do we put ourselves out of a job?" In other words, it's not just achieving the percentage goal, but it's also, as well, determining whether it's been achieved in a way that people have been empowered in their own country to continue to sustain that goal.

MENON: But that's precisely the – it leads very nicely into the question I wanted to ask, which is that, in your evolution from emergency relief to development, do you in fact stand a danger of, and have you in fact lost the fire in your belly? Because UNICEF as an emergency relief organization is something which people can identify with very clearly. Your job is very clearly seen as saving the children. But UNICEF as a development agency is something quite different. And you find, for example, that a magazine like Reader's Digest, which people tend to associate with family values, takes after you with a hatchet. I mean, I understand that much of it is in error, but how do you – what are the dangers there? How do you see that?

BELLAMY: No, I don't think we've lost the fire in the belly at all, and I come back to your question about measuring the success of the success. And by that I mean how far we've come and where we have to go. I think that the formula that UNICEF has used, which is a formula of setting some objective goals and attempting to go out and achieve those goals, and being able to report to people – and again, it's not UNICEF, we do it in partnership with the Governments where we are working, and increasingly not just only the national Government, because with increasing decentralization in the world today, it's at the national, it's at the regional, it's at the state, at the local level, it's with what is called civil society as well.... To the contrary, I believe – and again, I'm thinking about this conference I recently attended, where ministers of health and planning and education were there talking about where they were in going after the goals from the World Summit for Children. Now, some lend themselves to rather statistical analysis, such as immunization and others; others don't. For example, universal access to education and the Convention don't lend themselves quite as much to saying, okay, we just hit 75 per cent; they are harder. And in education it's not just access, it's also the quality of education. But to the contrary, I think there's an enthusiasm out there. I also think that UNICEF, I might say, benefits when it talks about development from the fact that it is the United Nations Children's Fund. So the development that it talks about, it talks about women and children, and you can't talk about

children without also talking about the status of women in terms of the quality of the life of children. And it's able to describe development in terms that people at least can understand.

You mentioned the Reader's Digest. I don't want to let that go unresponded to. Actually, I think they came after the entire UN with a hatchet, some of which, deserved, some of which, I might say, quite undeserved. And we took our fair share there, and I'd say, again –

LITTLEJOHNS: Unfair share, I say.

BELLAMY: – a little bit deserved, most undeserved. But I'm, you know, I think we – all organizations, we have to look at ourselves and say, look, can we make some improvements? And we should.

MENON: That leads directly into the question of UN reform, which is very much on the agenda for UNICEF in its fiftieth year and for the UN. Do you see UNICEF surviving as a stand-alone agency, or do you see it being consolidated with other development agencies?

BELLAMY: I see it continuing as I see a number of the UN agencies, as stand-alone agencies, because I think to just put them all together, I mean, it might sound wonderful, but you'd have this huge bureaucracy. But having said a stand-alone agency, I think it is incumbent upon us and all the other sister agencies – but I can only talk for us – to make sure that we are working as closely as possible at the grassroots level where the majority of our people are. We are 85 per cent of our people in the field, and if I had my way maybe I could push a couple more out of headquarters, but 85 per cent of our people are in the field; our programmes are developed at the country level. But it is incumbent on us to work with our sister UN agencies and, I might point out, not just only the UN agencies, [but with] a series of the non-governmental agencies, international and indigenous NGOs to look for ways to avoid duplication, to try and run ourselves as effectively and efficiently as possible. UNICEF right now is engaged in this top-to-bottom – we call it "management excellence programme", but people are involved. And we've done new productions about what our resources will be over the next few years, and while I think we're in much stronger shape than some other parts of the UN, nevertheless, for all of us at the UN, we've got to learn to live with fewer resources, and we've got to stretch our resources even more tightly.

So none of us are off the hook in terms of UN reform, although there are 9,000 versions of UN reform out there. I define UN reform as how can we run ourselves as efficiently and effectively in carrying out our programmes in the least duplicative way possible and as collaboratively as possible – all of which I think are challenges. I think we're moving in the right direction, but we've got room to improve.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ms. Bellamy, there was some criticism of alleged mismanagement in UNICEF before you came on board. Have you addressed these allegations, and have you found them to have been justified? And if so, what are you doing about them?

BELLAMY: Well, one very specific instance was identified in one of our offices in Africa, our country office in Kenya—the majority of our staff not involved in it, but some people were. And indeed, we did identify mismanagement, and we identified some instances, we believe, of fraud. So I don't even call it alleged, I happen to think it happened. We've made a series of changes, we've made some personnel changes, we've made some financial changes, some management changes, and we've tried to learn from that instance for the rest of the agency.

MOUAT: Shall I ask another here?

LITTLEJOHNS: Yes, please.

MOUAT: Empowerment of women: Is that now a central focus of your mission, and is that a change from the past when we had the impression of encouraging women as sort of nurturers and mothers? I've heard you, I think, and another UN official say that this was central to the mission. Is it? And if so, is it a change?

BELLAMY: It is part of the mission. I wouldn't call it the central facet of the mission. I think you can't talk about children without talking about the status of women, and not only their reproductive status in the sense of being mothers, because increasingly the role of the woman, her economic status, her productive status, her education status has a great deal to do with her ability to respond to her family and to her children. So it is part of the mission. But, I mean, children are the central focus of the mission. We just can't ignore the role of women in this context, and we make that very clear. That really is a policy that was established by our board some years ago.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ms. Bellamy, the problem of genital mutilation has been in the news a good deal lately. What's UNICEF doing about that, particularly in the African countries?

BELLAMY: It has been. I mean, it's another form of violence. It's often been a form of violence not spoken much of. It's one of these kinds of things, whether it's family violence or female genital mutilation, that goes on and, to some extent, eyes have been turned the other way. We happen to think that it is something that—we understand that it gets caught up in individual cultures, and certainly our role as UNICEF is not to go out and make a universal comment on cultural attitudes, but we believe this is an issue of violence, in this case, and we believe that education is very key to how one begins to respond to this in the community. So we take it seriously and we try and raise it in an educational context,

because we think it has enormous health implications. Our challenge is in the area of health-care, and so we don't think we can turn away from it.

LITTLEJOHNS: Earlier in the programme you spoke about child labour. There's not very much that UNICEF can do about that, surely. I mean, in poorer countries they almost have to use child labour in order to help support families.

BELLAMY: Well, first of all, UNICEF is a small organization. I mean, I think we're a wonderful organization, I hope so, I'm the Executive Director, but there's–

LITTLEJOHNS: Well, we wouldn't disagree with you on this point.

BELLAMY: But it is–I mean, whatever we can do anywhere we do, in partnership with the Governments and working with others. But we can make a contribution in child labour–I will give some examples: In Bangladesh recently, working with the ILO and with the Government of Bangladesh, we are involved in a project–it's a pilot project, if you will, in conjunction with rug manufacturers, of ways of basically not having the children working all day producing rugs and getting them back into school. Now, this involves both making the school easier for them, and it involves some financial compensation. It's also of interest to the Government, this case. Now, this is a pilot project and it's just starting and I'm sure it'll have some problems, but it's an example of something that can be done. So we're looking for different ways in which working with the Governments who have ultimately to be–the Governments and the private sector in civil society have got to take the lead, but there are ways that we can serve occasionally as a catalyst, occasionally a technical advisor, occasionally provide some resources–although our resources will not be huge. So we don't shy away from that. We don't stand there and say we are the world's experts on child labour, but we do sit there and say we offer to be of assistance, to push, to encourage, to train, to play a role in trying to deal with some of these knotty problems.

MENON: Can I ask you something in which UNICEF is directly involved? And that is the problem of unaccompanied minors as a result of–in war situations.

BELLAMY: Right.

MENON: I understand there are some 117,000 unaccompanied children in Rwanda, and moving away from the situation of conflict, a very large number of orphans because of AIDS. What exactly is the global magnitude of this problem?

BELLAMY: Well, I don't know the global magnitude of the problem. You mentioned two things, although they are not unrelated. First of all, on AIDS, generally it's a growing problem. It's growing faster among women and girls in the world today. They're not the largest percentage, but it is growing faster among women and girls. It's not limited to Africa. I mean, it is obviously happening in other areas of the world. And we are trying to work.... Now, there's a place, going back to UN reform if I might, there is now

UNAIDS, and we are committed to being a good partner to UNAIDS to try and carry out much of our HIV/AIDS work, which is both delivery of services and education and prevention, in conjunction with this consolidated UN programme.

With respect to unaccompanied minors, it's a major problem, very big problem in Rwanda. We've been working with organizations likes the Red Cross and others to try and reidentify and bring children back into families, if possible; if not, to try and get them at least into school so that they begin to have a future.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ms. Bellamy, that's all the time we have. Thank you for being with us on this edition of **World Chronicle**.

Our guest has been Carol Bellamy, Executive Director of UNICEF. She was interviewed by Bhaskar Menon of the *International Documents Review* and Lucia Mouat of *The Christian Science Monitor*.

I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle**.

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